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The Rutland Jewish Center: A Centennial History



JACOB SHERMAN

Rich wood paneling and ornate chandeliers help make the sanctuary of the Rutland Jewish Center a warm and spiritual place to worship.

About the Editor

Jacob Sherman recently retired as the reference and technical services librarian after 38 years at the Rutland Free Library. He also has served as Secretary of the Rutland Historical Society and is chairperson of its Publications Committee.

He has made numerous contributions to the Society's Quarterlies: "When the 'Babe' Came to Rutland – October 1919" *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 30 No. 3); "Lost Buildings of Old Rutland: A Calendar", *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 33 No. 4); "Lost Buildings of Old Rutland Revisited: A Calendar", *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 34 No. 4); "Then and Now: A Calendar", *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 35 No. 4); " 'People Make a Library' The Rutland Free Library at 120 Years", *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 36 No. 3); "Lost Structures of Old Rutland: A Calendar", *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 36 No. 4); "The Flood of 1927 In Rutland: A Calendar", *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 37 No. 4); "The Art of Dr. Emelie Perkins: A Calendar", *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 38 No. 4) and "Faces of the Past: A Calendar", *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol.39 No. 4).

Introduction

During the year 2010-2011 the Rutland Jewish Center has been recognizing and celebrating the hundredth year anniversary of its birth.

Starting with just a few dedicated members and holding its services for its first seventeen years in a variety of locations, it found in 1927 its permanent home in one of Vermont's loveliest buildings, the Baxter Library.

What follows is an attempt to capture the history of this institution that has long served the religious and social needs of the Rutland Jewish community and sought also to serve the wider community. For decades the Center played a key role in Jewish life statewide, while today it continues to define its role in a region that is always evolving.

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The Rutland Jewish Center: A Centennial History

By Jacob Sherman

Early History of the Rutland Jewish Community

What in modern Jewish history is known as “the Emancipation” took place during the Napoleonic Wars in territories that later became Germany. For a brief time Jews experienced new rights and privileges and opportunities. However, this period of enlightened rule was all too short-lived for in the 1830s many of the previous discriminatory and restrictive laws were re-enacted. Thus, beginning in 1840, with borders open, large numbers of German Jews emigrated to America in search of a better way of life for themselves and their families.

By the middle of the 19th Century, some of these Jews, mostly seeking to make a living as peddlers, were active along the route from New York City to Plattsburgh, selling goods from their packs to farmers and tradesmen. Before long, small Jewish communities were taking hold in slate-quarrying communities such as Granville, New York and Poultney, Vermont. Granville records show that a number of Jewish merchants and tailors were residing there about ten years prior to the Civil War.¹

The Poultney community was active during the Civil war and thereafter. It had a house of worship as well as a *shochet*, a kosher butcher.

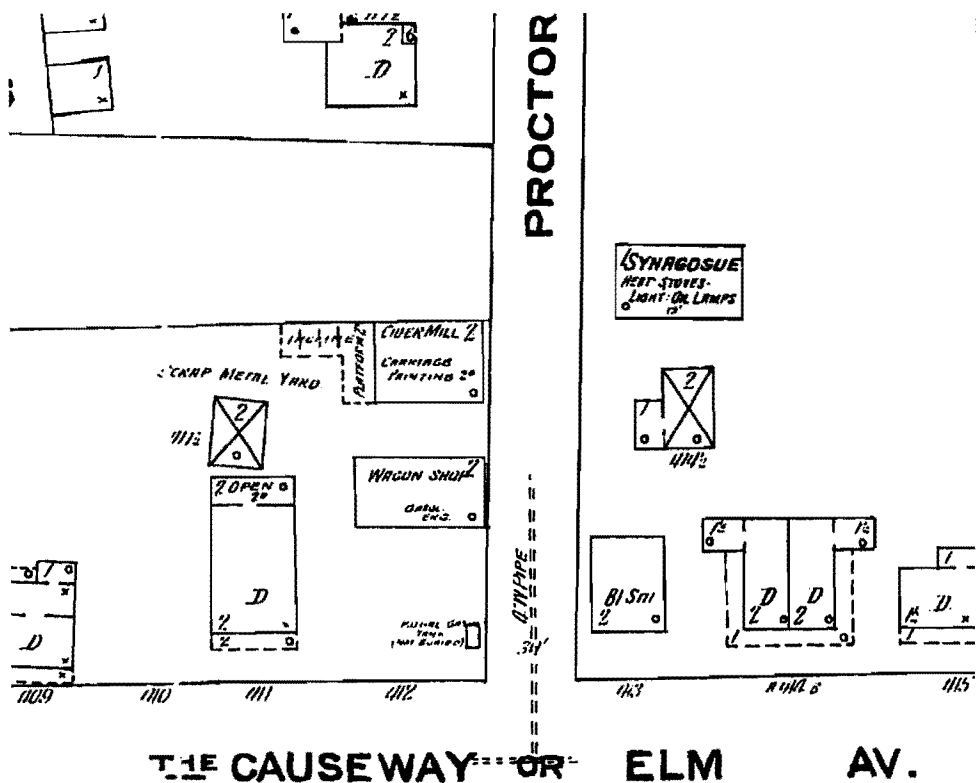
A cemetery was acquired in East Poultney in 1873, and in 1888 the B’nai Israel and Hebrew Cemetery Association was officially incorporated, with articles of association signed by eight members of the community.

There are 25 graves in the now abandoned and crumbling East Poultney Jewish cemetery. For some reason, around 1895 the Poultney Jewish community disbanded and its members moved away. A number of these Jews migrated to West Rutland that for the next decade or so became the center of Jewish life in Rutland County. In 1906 the West Rutland community established Congregation Anshei Shalom, the membership of which consisted of six families from West Rutland and six from Rutland. By 1907 the fledgling congregation had its own place of worship.²

By 1910 the momentum had swung to Rutland in terms of Jewish community growth. Jews had already resided in the city for quite some

¹ Samuelson, Myron. The Story of the Jewish Community of Burlington, Vermont, pp 21-25

² Samuelson, pp. 26-28.



The West Rutland Synagogue on the east side of Proctor Street.

time. In 1880 Abram H. Emanuel, Lewis and Morris Abraham, Herman Bamberg, Aaron Ellis, Isaac and Jacob Heyman, George and Seamon Hirschfeld, and Louis Jacobs were all listed as merchants. But no congregation had been formed.³ In 1910 under the leadership of Joseph Mintzer the movement to establish a congregation in Rutland gained force.

During the spring and summer of that year plans evolved rapidly with discussion taking place on 22 May about establishing a society for the holding of religious services. Sam Fineberg was elected president of the new entity "subject to his acceptance" and dues were set at ten cents a week. The congregation was to be called Adath Israel.

In June the members planned to raffle off a diamond ring as a fund raiser with the tickets to be priced at 25 cents each. In September, in preparation for the Jewish high holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the members rented a hall as well as a Torah, which is a sacred scroll containing in Hebrew the Five Books of Moses, and hired a cantor.

To cover expenses, members attending the services would be assessed

³ Samuelson, p. 29

\$1.50 while guests would be charged \$2.00. The hall was on the second floor of the Verder Block, a wooden structure on the northwest corner of Merchants Row and West Street where the Marble Bank building now stands.



The Verder Block where services were held on the second floor.

On 14 March 1911, a charter was issued to the new congregation, the subscribers being M. Goldman, M. C. Levenson, M. H. Levenson, Harry E. Rosenberg, and H. H. Wolk.⁴ Also in the spring of 1911, Hyman Wolk was given \$45 with the instruction to purchase a "Sefer Torah" when he next visited New York City. On that occasion he also returned with a "Magillah" (Scroll of the Book of Esther).

For the next several years the congregation continued to hold services primarily in the Verder Block, but in October 1922, it purchased a sturdy brick building (still standing) on the northeast corner of West and Elm Streets as its permanent home. It is recorded that a Hebrew teacher, a Mr. Levin, occupied one of the upstairs rooms.⁵

The year 1927 may go down as perhaps the most significant in the history of the Rutland Jewish Center for it was then that the congrega-

⁴ Samuelson, p. 29

⁵ Rutland Jewish Center, 1927-1987, Diamond Jubilee Booklet, p. 2.



First Jewish Center owned by the Jewish community.

tion purchased for \$12,500, the Baxter Memorial Library, in which it has continued to worship until the present day (See back cover). In the 1890s the widow of Horace Henry Baxter had built this building, considered by many accounts among the loveliest in the state, as a memorial to her late husband who had died in 1884. Baxter, born in 1818 in Saxtons River, had risen well before the age of 40 to become a titan of railroading and finance, serving at different times as president of both the Rutland Railroad and the New York Central, prior to its takeover by Commodore Vanderbilt. Deciding to locate in Rutland in 1854, he had erected a Gilded Era mansion, said to be perhaps the most lavish residence ever built in the state, on the site of what is now the Rutland Middle School. The Baxter property, which in its final years became known as the Crestwood Hotel and traces of which still exist today, was finally demolished in 1945.

It is interesting that it was a Jewish architect from New York, Arnold W. Brunner (1857-1925), who designed the Baxter Library. This commission came relatively early in a distinguished career that included the design of many synagogues, among them Temple Beth El on Fifth Avenue in New York City.

Among the early Jewish families who were instrumental in either

the creation or early development of a Conservative congregation in Rutland were many names still known today: Berger, Dick, Fishman, Frank, Gelvan, Ginsburg, Goldman, Kantor, Kazon, Lash, Mintzer, Rosen, Salander, Slater, Weiss, and Wolk. They laid the foundation on which future generations have built.

The Rutland Jewish community, which began with six families in 1907, reached 40 in 1936, 92 in 1961 and 125 in 1989, possibly its peak. Since then, the congregation has struggled to maintain that level of membership as older members have passed on or moved away, often southward or to be closer to children. Meanwhile, declining employment opportunities in the region have slowed the arrival of new members. The author can recall Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services in the synagogue's Mintzer Memorial Hall during the 1970s and 1980s when it was a given that worshippers would occupy every place and extra seating would have to be found.

During the Center's first five years, members of the congregation must have been primarily responsible for conducting services. In the early 1930's a Rabbi Mazure was hired but not much is recorded of his tenure other than that he stayed only two years. The new spiritual leader, Rabbi Max Weine, came at the end of 1936 and stayed until 1943. He was highly regarded and, as one innovation, arranged to have his sermons as well as musical selections by a small choir occasionally broadcast over radio station WSYB. Rabbi Ludwig Roeder followed Rabbi Weine, and remained to the end of 1944. The next occupant of the pulpit was Rabbi Jacob Handler who led the congregation through 1959. This was a busy and thriving period for the Center as well as for the city's downtown where many of the retail establishments were owned and operated by Jewish merchants.

By far the longest tenure of any of the Rutland Jewish Center spiritual leaders was that of Rabbi Solomon Goldberg who with his wife Marilyn came to Rutland in 1960 as a 30-year-old rabbinical school graduate and stayed for the next 42 years, retiring in 2002. Needless to say, Rabbi Goldberg left a deep imprint on the congregation, particularly in the area of Jewish education where he taught generations of children, preparing them to both participate in and lead services as well as imbuing them with knowledge of Jewish rituals and holidays.

The first decade of the 21st Century has brought two new rabbis to the congregation. Rabbi Jerry Seidler led the synagogue from 2002 to 2005 while Rabbi Douglas Weber has been in Rutland since that time. Both of these rabbis introduced a contemporary perspective into the service but continued to emphasize the importance of education, outreach, and interfaith activities.

The National Council of Jewish Women

Much of the history of the Rutland Jewish Center can be told through the minutes of the Rutland chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women. This group, which in many ways was the predecessor of the present Sisterhood, worked tirelessly for the betterment of the Center, for the promotion of Jewish life, regionally, nationally, and worldwide as well as for the improvement of the Rutland community as a whole.

In October 1928, the national headquarters charged the local chapter with preparing a program promoting world peace. The tenth anniversary of the armistice that ended World War I, "the war to end all wars," would be coming up shortly. It was a time of optimism and prosperity in the waning days of the administration of Calvin Coolidge. The fearful challenges of the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism, and a new World War were all in the future.

In December of that year as another fund raising idea, the women of the chapter proposed showing a film on Sunday night at the Strand Theater. This idea came to naught, however, as early in 1929 local ministers protested against Sunday performances. The women decided to hold a box social instead and \$66.00 was raised.

A card party hosted by Mrs. Joseph Mintzer, the formation of a committee to arrange once a month socials, and a program for the "juniors" or youth of the congregation consisting of the performance of one-act playlets followed by a dance were among typical activities in 1929. The \$29.77 raised from the last-named event was used to purchase a "Victrola" and phonograph records. The women also took part in once-a-month sewing meetings where they worked on sewing received from the Palestine Emergency Supplies Bureau.

At every meeting the chapter received numerous requests for charitable contributions. Some of the recipients of small donations included the Palestine Lighthouse for the Blind and the American Pro Falasha Committee for the Religious Education of Abyssinian Jews. Locally, \$5 was donated to the Children's Aid of Vermont and \$25 to the Mayor's Emergency Fund. The women also made substantial contributions for paying off the synagogue's mortgage, a practice that would continue for decades.

A meeting of the chapter in February 1932 attracted an unusually large turnout of 35 members. The guest speaker that evening was Dr. Emilie Perkins of Mendon, a pioneer woman physician who made great contributions to the field of child health, particularly in the Rutland region. Following the talk, entertainment was provided by a quartet of youthful saxophone players led by future pediatrician Arthur Wolk, who by his own recollection was a sixth-grader.

By late 1932 a Sunday school had been successfully launched. Con-

gratulations were extended to Mrs. B. Levine, Mrs. Samuel Frank, Mr. Wolk, "and our young teachers" – Helen Berger, Ruth Gelvan, Estelle Wolinsky, Rea and Clarice Mintzer – "for all their efforts."

It should be noted that back then it was common practice for married women to be recorded in minutes as Mrs. and to be identified by the first name of the husband. Also, the men and women's groups operated in separate spheres. The women did not enjoy full religious rights. Women were not welcomed to the *bimah* or pulpit during services and, in further conformance with Orthodox practice, women and men sat on separate sides of the sanctuary. It is said that the latter practice did not end until Hyman Wolk insisted his wife Alice be allowed to sit next to him. If the women chafed under these strictures it is not reflected in the minutes. What is reflected is that they did everything possible to support their husbands and were always ready to offer assistance, financial or otherwise.

A Dark New Era

The meeting of 1 October 1933 was a typical one except for one chilling note: earlier that year the Nazis under Adolf Hitler had seized power in Germany. Their anti-Semitic agenda was well known and already a spate of discriminatory regulations against Jews was being enacted. In response, the chapter voted unanimously not to purchase any German-made goods.

By 1936, the chapter offered at each meeting a "memory box" for the purpose of collecting funds to assist German Jewish refugees. On 1 November 1936 Ludwig Lewisohn addressed the Rutland Jewish community on behalf of the Joint Distribution Committee and the United Palestine Appeal. He spoke in urgent terms of the increasingly dire situation confronting Jews in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. By 1938 the Council's national office was requesting that each chapter donate an amount in dollars equal to three times the number of members to aid German Jewish refugee children. A Ways & Means Committee was established to set about meeting this obligation.

Another initiative of the chapter, begun in 1939, was its endorsement of the concept of a free public school kindergarten in Rutland City. During this period, the chapter was addressed by the field secretary of the Vermont Kindergarten Association, Mrs. Frank Bryant, who praised the group for its efforts in Rutland at a time when free public kindergarten was to be found in only four Vermont towns.

Women continued to serve as major fund-raisers through an unceasing round of cabaret dances, raffles, bingo games, bridge parties, masquerades, holiday dinners and rummage sales. On 1 February 1941, at the suggestion of Rabbi Weine, three women – Mrs. Myer Hackel, Mrs.

Louis Berger, and Mrs. Harry Mintzer – were appointed to serve with the men on the Sunday School and Hebrew Committees, suggesting at least the beginning of a trend that women be viewed as equal participants. Summing up the chapter's situation by the summer of 1942, secretary Pearl Rosen wrote: "We can feel that it has been a most successful year despite the fact that the country is at war and times are most uncertain...."

War Efforts

By late 1942 the impact of World War II was being felt in a variety of ways. At one meeting members were advised that Sabbath candles must be blacked out in the event of an air raid warning. The project for the year would be the purchase of a defense bond that would eventually be used toward improving the lighting system when electrical materials would become available.

On 3 January 1943, Mrs. Jeanne Sherman reported she had sold \$537 in war stamps and bonds since the previous meeting. During the first week in March, eleven of the Center's women volunteered to serve at the Central Vermont Bond Booth, a drive which ultimately resulted in \$14,021 in sales.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Morris Doloff, serving as chairman of the Rutland County Drive for Clothes for Russian Relief, urged fellow members to bring clothing to the Hotel Bardwell basement store. Many members worked for the Red Cross during this period, sewing and knitting. Parties were held to raise money for the Service to the Foreign Born Fund and gift boxes were sent to young men serving in the armed forces. In October 1943, president Rose Weiss declared that the chapter's goal for the coming year was "to do all within our power to build morale, lend comfort and give pleasure to our boys who are serving our country."

In her 1943-44 annual report, Secretary Helen Ginsburg departed from the customary listing of events and activities to offer an emotional tribute to the "unsung courage, confidence, and constraint" of her fellow members in dealing with the challenges of the times.

If it were in her power, she wrote, "a good conduct ribbon" would be presented to "the wives, mothers, and sisters of those in service for not hiding behind the cloak of their anxiety, using that for an evasion of the tasks at hand..." She concluded "By the documentary evidence of your share in war bond sales, donations, participation in national affairs, service to the Red Cross and interest in civic betterments have you met your responsibilities. By precept and example you can feel free to teach your sons and daughters the honor of serving such a country as America."

The Rutland Jewish Center was extremely fortunate in that all of



WW II local Jewish veterans. Back row (l to r)Maurice Mintzer, Bill Wolinsky, Richard Freeman, Louis Rome. Middle Row (l to r) Philip Weiss, Moses Tropp, George Ravit, Mac Berger. Front Harold Cantor.

its young men who served in the armed forces returned safely. Among these were Arthur Dick, Marvin Berger, Norman Adelman, Irving Slater, Arthur Wolk, Raymond Kantor, Louis Rome, William Seff and Bernard Dick.

By the end of 1945 the members of the Center had reached another happy milestone, the paying off of the building's mortgage. This was celebrated "amid much rejoicing and merriment" on December 9th at a "Burning of the Mortgage Party" which also included the formal installation of the new spiritual leader, Rabbi Jacob Handler.

Support for Zionism

With the successful conclusion of the Second World War, thoughts turned increasingly to the plight of those few of Europe's Jews who had survived the Holocaust, many of whom were still interned in Displaced Persons (DP) camps. The horrific destruction of six million also brought a resurgent desire to complete the Zionist enterprise and reestablish a Jewish state in Israel after nearly a two thousand year hiatus.

The local chapter sought to promote awareness of these issues. As early as May 1945, a plea was issued for Zionist membership. Later that year Mrs. Helen Ginsburg "urged us all to study Palestine, so that

we may know how to answer our Christian neighbors intelligently.” In late spring of 1947 the synagogue’s “Junior Young Judeans” sponsored a play on Palestine at the city library to which all were urged to attend. In August it was announced that there would be a speaker on “the Palestine question” at Shawnee Institute on Elfin Lake. In December of that year, the local B’nai B’rith Chapter sponsored an address by Capt. Harry Sperber, chief interpreter at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals of the highest level.

Sometimes local assistance was of a very direct and tangible nature. In 1948 the congregation undertook to bring to Rutland from Europe six displaced persons and their families, some who remained here. Local businessmen William Ginsburg and Louis Kazon saw to it that employment was provided for these individuals. The previous year, under the always effective leadership of Mrs. Morris (Gussie) Doloff, the 52 boxes of clothing and foodstuffs that had been assigned to the chapter for refugee relief by the National had been collected, packaged, and sent abroad. In 1951, three years after the new Jewish state had been established, the local community supported it through the purchase of \$40,000 in Israel Bonds.

In other activity, in the late 1940s Mrs. Samuel (Jeanne) Sherman came up with the idea of sponsoring a pops concert as a fund-raiser. The event, which was held at the Rutland Armory, proved so successful that for the next few years and throughout the 1950s it became an annual fixture, and, in fact, a new entity, Pops Concerts of Vermont, Inc., was incorporated with the Secretary of State.

These postwar years also marked the beginning of the baby boom era and soon new children were being born into the community. Sadly, these years also marked the passing of individuals who had been among the congregation’s founders. In early 1947 members bid farewell to Alice Wolk and early in 1948 moments of silence were observed in memory of Joseph Mintzer and Myer Isenberg.

During the first half of the 1950s it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to suggest that the Rutland Jewish Center had become a beehive of both Jewish and secular activities. It was not uncommon, for example, for the Center to host meetings of the Vermont Jewish Council, an organization in existence at that time, and so it was that the semi-annual gathering of that group took place here in June 1952, with dinner served at the Fairmont Restaurant. In October the second annual conference of the Vermont Zionist Organization was held here with one of Vermont’s U.S. senators, Ralph Flanders, as the main speaker. In February 1954, the local chapter hosted the mid-winter conference of the Vermont Federation of Women’s Clubs with luncheon at the Wheeler Williams Restaurant, which later became Royal’s Hearthside. A few months later, it was



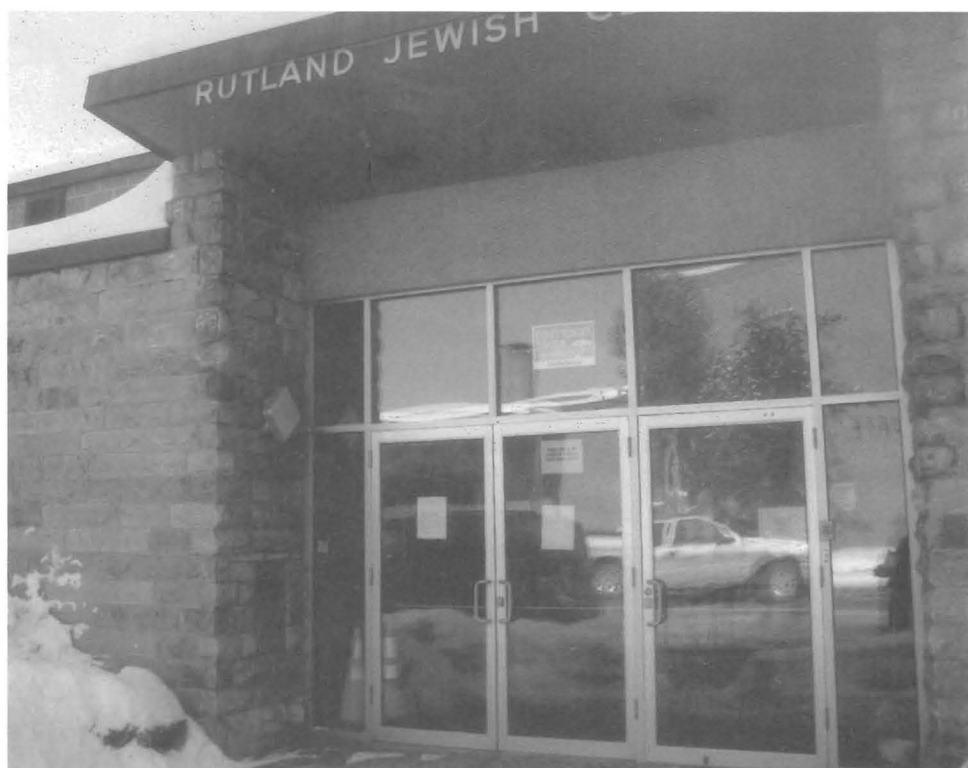
Jewish Women planning Pops Concert. Seated (l to r) Mrs. Lewis Salander and Mrs. Morris Doloff. Standing (l to r) Mrs. Martin Freeman, Mrs. Robert Tannen and Mrs. Jack Weiss.

reported by Clarice Ravit that a very successful three-day conclave of the Vermont Jewish Youth Council was held in Rutland with all of the housing, food and transportation arrangements such events entailed. The year 1954 also saw the Rutland synagogue joining forces with others to celebrate the Tercentenary of Jewry in America.

The next milestone for the Center was the completion of a major building addition in 1956. In the planning stages for a number of years, the structure, subsequently dedicated as Mintzer Memorial Hall, greatly expanded the area available for High Holiday services, life-cycle events, dinners, parties and cultural events of all types. In addition, the new



(Above) The **bimah** or pulpit in the Rutland Jewish Center's Mintzer Memorial Hall. (Below) Mintzer Memorial Hall was erected in 1956. It provides members an additional space for worship and socializing.



building afforded much needed classroom space for the Sunday and Hebrew schools. The cost of the new addition was approximately \$75,000.

During the rest of the 1950s the Center continued to be an active place. On 30 September 1957, it was reported that the local chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women had established a membership goal of 84...and was very close to achieving it. The same year the chapter sponsored another in its Pops series, this time featuring a musical sextet from the Boston Lyric Theatre at the high school auditorium. This was change from hosting the Vermont Symphony Orchestra under Alan Carter at the Armory. The chapter had formed what it called a Geriatric Committee to arrange parties for the aged and infirm at the Women's Reformatory. Governor Joseph Johnson and Lt. Governor Robert Stafford often attended these events. Members also spent hundreds of hours maintaining the book wagon at the Rutland Hospital, while other members traveled with Rabbi Handler to the Brandon Training School and to the Brattleboro Retreat to help Jewish residents celebrate holidays. On the wider community front, the Council took charge, for the first time, of the Mother's March on Polio and volunteered for the Well Baby Clinic, a service which had been started back in the 1940s by Mrs. Samuel (Anna) Frank and was devoted to providing medical attention for children of economically disadvantaged families. It is hard to believe, recounting all this, that at a board meeting in the fall of 1958 there was actually talk of the chapter needing "a shot in the arm".

The decade of the 1950s ended in November 1959, with the departure of Rabbi Handler and his much-admired wife Gert, and the following month with the passing of one of the Center's original subscribers, Hyman Wolk.

1960-1990

The year 1960 set the stage for the next several decades at the Center for it brought to the Rutland community Rabbi Solomon Goldberg, a newly ordained graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York who was undertaking his first full-time pulpit. The new *rebbe* **betzin** Marilyn was a gifted vocalist who shared her husband's passion for Conservative Judaism.

Though the rabbi was relatively young and just starting out, he displayed no hesitancy in advocating a strong education program. He asked Council to sponsor adult education classes. He also requested that funds be provided for the purchase of additional textbooks and supplies for the religious school. The sum of \$800 was voted for this purpose.

During the early 1960s many of the postwar baby boom children

were reaching thirteen – the age of bar and bat mitzvah. Within a short span of time the synagogue celebrated nine such events – the bar mitzvahs of Robert Myers, Steven Gartner, Martin Weiss, Richard Sherman, Michael Becker, Alan Wolk and Allen Gartner and the bat mitzvahs of Linda Lash and Laura Meyer.

Another sign of the times was the concern with civil defense. During the Kennedy administration fear of nuclear attack from the Soviet Union reached its peak. Schools conducted drills in which students huddled under their desks, while at the Center pamphlets were distributed on the construction of family fallout shelters.

In the fall of 1961 an Interfaith Breakfast held at the Center was attended by no fewer than 160 women and featured a well-received program of Jewish customs and music prepared by Rabbi and Marilyn Goldberg.



JACOB SHERMAN

Rabbi Solomon Golberg and his wife Marilyn participate in a candle lighting ceremony at the bar mitzvah party of Joshua Cohen (left). Dad Larry Cohen is at rear.



Steve Gartner (left) poses for the camera with Rabbi Goldberg (right) at Steve's bar mitzvah.



Bar mitzvah of Sam Ravit. Visiting Rabbi on left.

Secession from the "National"

With the passage of time new generations of women were becoming increasingly discontented with the rising dues quotas and other assessments established by the National. There was a desire to break free from these burdens imposed from outside and more fully devote the chapter's efforts to the synagogue itself and the Rutland community. Votes were taken to secede from the National but fell just short, and for a number of years, largely out of respect for the sensibilities of older members, the status quo reigned. Finally, in May 1966, the chapter voted decisively to disaffiliate from the National Council of Jewish Women and it became henceforth known as the Rutland Jewish Center Sisterhood.

Ironically, perhaps, the separation came shortly after the National had conferred special honors on two of the chapter's long-time members: Mrs. Myer (Rose) Hackel was honored with a "Diamond Jubilee Jewel" Award and Mrs. Morris (Gussie) Doloff was presented with a Leadership Award. Just a year and a half prior to this, the indomitable Mrs. Doloff had announced her retirement as chairman of the rummage sale, a role she had successfully fulfilled for the previous 20 years. Secretary Margaret Dick wrote: "Council cannot express the gratitude [she] so

richly deserves. We know she deserves the privilege of retiring, but we know too, that there will never be another like her.”

The year 1967 saw significant improvement to the synagogue’s physical plant. Various meeting rooms were completely renovated and a new **bimah** was installed. Most notable was the creation in the lower level of the original structure of the Libby Lash Lounge, providing a cozy space for meetings, luncheons, Oneg Shabbats, and a library.

In 1968, Reva Stein was elected president of the area Interfaith Council. Also in that year the Center Sisterhood joined with other religious organizations in contributing toward the establishment of a community center to be run under the auspices of the Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council, an organization with which Rabbi Goldberg became closely involved and on whose board of directors he served.

The 1960s also brought the passing of Anna Frank, Lena Mehl, and Myer Hackel, all of whom had played such important roles in the synagogue’s formative decades.

In June 1975, it was overwhelmingly voted to grant women full religious rights within the synagogue. Henceforth, they would have the right to be counted in the **minyan**, to be granted **aliyahs** (making the blessings during the Torah reading), and to read from the Torah itself. Evelyn Westebbe shortly afterward became the first woman to lead a Friday evening service and to chant a **haftorah** not in connection with a bat mitzvah. Since that time women have consistently played a major role in religious services as well as in all aspects of congregational affairs.

In March of 1979, the regular synagogue meeting was postponed in order to hold a special celebration in honor of the signing of a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. For many this might have been a bittersweet moment as thoughts returned to the Yom Kippur service of October 1973, when at about 2:00 P.M. Lewis Salander ascended the **bimah** to inform the rabbi that a coordinated surprise attack had been launched on Israel. The situation was dire as simultaneously Egyptian forces succeeded in crossing the Suez Canal and Syrian forces stormed the Golan Heights. The service was interrupted to offer special prayers for Israel’s safety while further news reports were anxiously awaited. Some expected the world would be outraged that a sneak attack had been perpetrated on Israel on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar when the nation would be at prayer, but it didn’t happen. It was a lesson learned.

The later 1970s and 1980s brought to the fore a surge of new and younger members into Sisterhood including Karen Gartner, Shelley Gartner, Sandra Gartner, Madeline Sherman, Bonnie Cohen, Jane Kalina, Brenda Cohen, Shelley Goodman, Cookie Mac, Nancy Stein, De-

nise Arnold, Susan Dick and Marcia Arnold. Sheryl Tepper served a particularly productive term as president as did Betsy Chase and Evelyn Westebbe, while other members including Ruth Rosenberg, Ruth Sher, Shirley Rosen, Shirley Goldman, Lee Warshaw, Phyllis Aliber, Lee Rohe, and Ginger Marx made important contributions.

It was during this period that the first edition of *The Kosher Yankee* was published. The cookbook enjoyed wide popularity in both the Jewish and general communities with copies finding their way to families and relatives in cities and towns far beyond Rutland. In 2010 an attractive and even more comprehensive second edition was published, featuring a cover painting of the Center by noted area artist Peter Huntoon.

To the Present

Though continuing to be an active institution in the 1990s, the Center began to feel the impact of a membership that was aging, moving southward, or in some cases passing on. The congregation mourned the loss of stalwart members Louis Rome in 1993 and Lewis Salander in 1996. Lew, who for years rarely missed either a Friday night or Saturday morning service and had his own seat on the aisle in the first row, had always struck this author as, in the words of one responsive reading, “a cedar of Lebanon,” a man of exceptional vigor “even in old age.” The decade also saw Ilse Fuchs reach her 80th birthday and Shirley and Dan Myers celebrate their 50th anniversary.

With dues collections declining and expenses mounting, budgetary matters became an increasing concern. Efforts were made to avoid using income from endowment funds to meet current expenses, but this was not always possible.

The twice-yearly rummage sales, however, continued to be major fund-raisers. The amount of money raised was impressive and certainly would have amazed the dedicated ladies of Mrs. Doloff’s time.

As the decade ended there was news that the Well Baby Clinic, the service started in the 1940s by Anna Frank, was going to be disbanded. Because more needy children were now able to obtain medical and dental attention through Medicaid and the Dr. Dynasaur program, the decline in the number of children being seen at the clinic had accelerated. It was noted that the clinic, which over the decades had drawn upon the services of esteemed local physicians including Dr. Emilie Perkins and Dr. Arthur Wolk, could be reactivated should the need again arise.

The millennial year of 2000 also marked the 40th anniversary of Rabbi and Marilyn Goldberg’s leadership of the congregation. The membership honored them on this occasion by means of a performance at the Paramount Theater of the oratorio “Haggadah” by Morton Gold, a synagogue member and nationally respected composer of Jewish music. The

successful event, chaired by Sheryl Tepper, featured numerous tributes to the rabbi, including one from the White House itself, and brought together soloists, chorus, and instrumentalists from distant communities.

In an interview with the *Herald* that appeared the day of the concert, April 2nd, the rabbi praised “the spirit in our synagogue” and described the sanctuary as one of the most beautiful in the United States.

Commenting on the education program he and Marilyn had established over the years, he stated: “I’m proud...of what the young people of our congregation have learned. I’m interested in having them appreciate the beauty of Jewish religious tradition and experience God’s presence through being able to both participate in and lead both synagogue and home ceremonies.”

The rabbi further observed that during his career he had performed over 200 bar and bat mitzvahs. He reflected that while he had officiated at many marriages, the number of burials he had conducted exceeded them.

By the fall of 2001, the now 71-year-old rabbi announced that the time had come for his retirement. He offered to continue conducting services until a successor could be found, and a search committee co-chaired by Allen Gartner was formed.

On 4 August 2002, the Center welcomed a new spiritual leader, Rabbi Jerry Seidler, along with his wife, Kathy Bress, and two school age daughters. A 44-year-old graduate of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, “Rabbi Jerry” had left a career as a corporate lawyer to pursue a calling to the rabbinate. His experience included a stint as a student rabbi at a congregation in suburban Philadelphia as well as volunteer service at the World Trade Center in the wake of the “9/11 attack”. Among the assets he brought to his new position were a strong singing voice and a flexible approach to Judaism, one that, as he expressed it, “was growing and evolving – rooted in the past but not beholden to it.”

By late 2003 an evolving congregation was debating whether it wished to remain Conservative in its religious philosophy or follow one of the other possible paths within Judaism: Reform, Reconstructionist, or Unaffiliated. After a series of presentations by authorities on each of these paths, no change was made.

On 5 September 2004, a story appeared in the *Herald* describing a rare sacred object that had years before come to be in the possession of the synagogue. This was the so-called Holocaust Torah, which a Jewish family in Czechoslovakia had entrusted for safekeeping to Christian neighbors following the Nazi invasion. It was hidden by that family at great personal risk throughout World War II and afterward. In the

1950s the eighteen-inch scroll was smuggled out of the then Communist-bloc country and ultimately found its way to a store in New York selling Jewish religious objects from which it was purchased by the Center in the 1960s. Both Rabbi Goldberg and Rabbi Seidler made it a point on Holocaust Remembrance Day to bring out this scroll from its place in the Holy Ark and read from it.

Rabbi Seidler remained with the congregation until the spring of 2005 after which he obtained a rabbinical position with another congregation.

Meanwhile, in 2005 the affiliation issue again surfaced and needed to be acted upon. Following a highly charged meeting at which all present were given the opportunity to voice their opinions, a vote was taken. The final result was sharply divided but because the two-thirds majority required by the by-laws to make such a major change failed by a small margin, the congregation stayed Conservative.

Against this background, the congregation late in 2005 welcomed a new spiritual leader, Rabbi Douglas Weber. Before coming to Rutland, Rabbi Weber and his wife Jessica, a music educator, had worked as educators in Jewish schools in Newton, Massachusetts. Prior to that experience, he had spent over 20 years as a congregational rabbi serving synagogues in Ohio, Maine, and Boulder, Colorado. Notable for services that included a special brand of humor and a novel approach to melody, Rabbi Weber also won plaudits for his work as an educator as well as for outreach and interfaith activities.

The years 2009-2010 saw the sudden passing of two members in their early 60s: Madeline Sherman and Steven Gartner. Their loss touched many. In 2010 the congregation also mourned the loss of by far its oldest member, the irrepressible June Salander who passed on just short of her 102nd birthday. Born in 1908, June had been a vibrant and vital member of the synagogue for 70 years, serving two terms as president of Council in the 1940s.

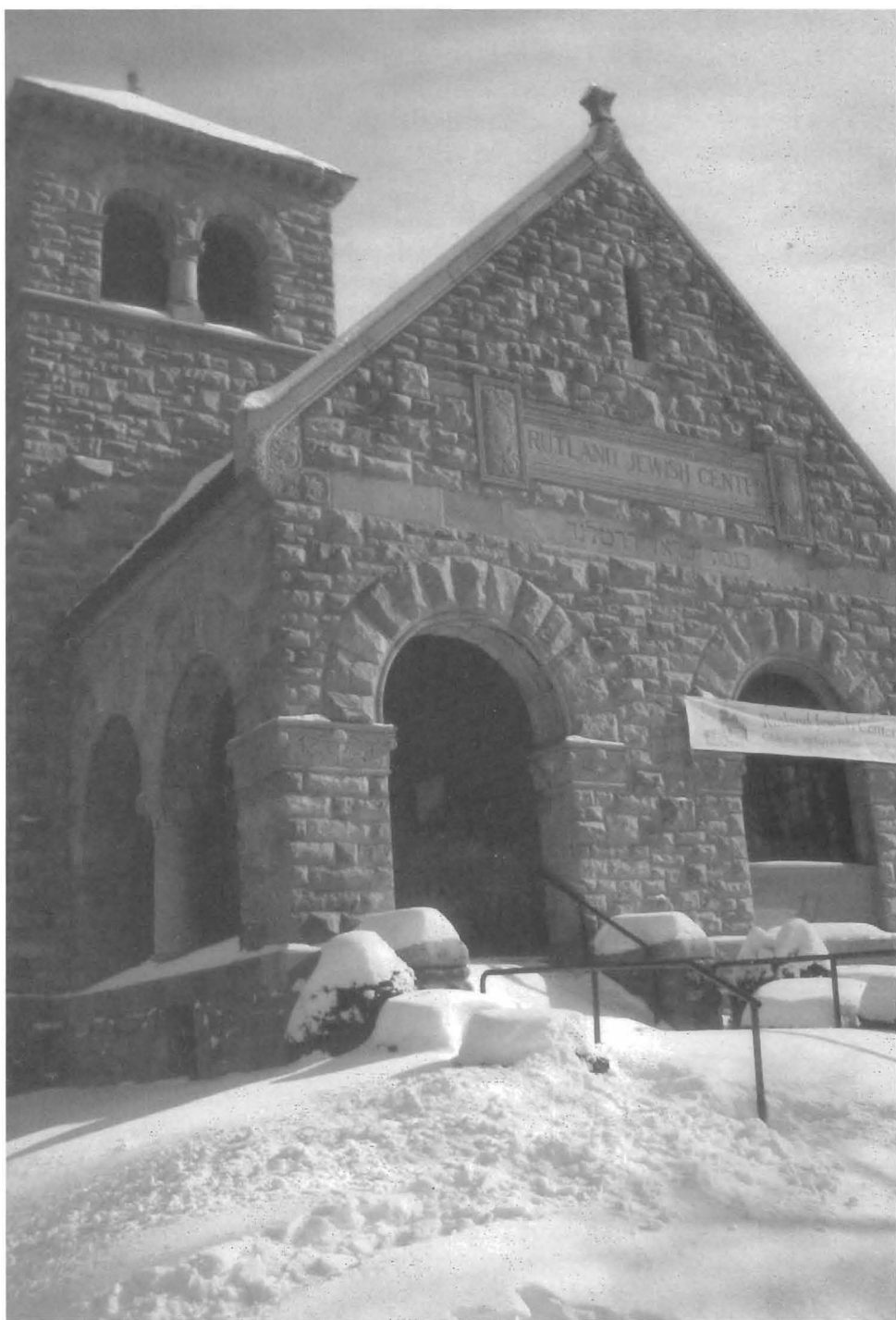
The Future

As the Center celebrates its Centennial, it can look back on decades of growth as well as on dedicated early members to whom the synagogue and its satellite organizations were a total way of life. The founders and their immediate successors saw the organization through a Depression, World Wars, and other demanding times, times which to some extent are being experienced now as the nation seeks to weather a Great Recession and wrestles with new threats to the world order that have arisen in the wake of 9/11.

Like congregations in many other American small cities and towns far removed from the major Jewish population centers in the metropoli-

tan areas, the Rutland Jewish Center has experienced a typical growth curve. It reached its apogee in the years 1950 through 1980 when Jewish merchants predominated downtown and more Jewish professionals were active in areas such as medicine, law and accounting. Those generations have mostly passed on or relocated while their educated children for the most part have sought lives and career opportunities elsewhere. Beginning in 1990 new members arrived infrequently while others who had been here for a while decided to move away.

The future of a Jewish congregation in a city that is no longer the manufacturing, commercial, and political powerhouse it once was will be a challenging one. In fact, the entire experience of being a Jew in America may well become more demanding as the Holocaust grows increasingly distant and ever new campaigns to demonize and delegitimize the Jewish homeland of Israel as well as undermine its right to defend itself, grow in force. If, however, present and future generations can summon just a small portion of the excitement, dedication, and hard work that characterized the Rutland Jewish Center's founders and early members, we can hopefully be confident that those challenges will be met.



The Romanesque-styled Baxter Library, originally built as a memorial to rail titan Horace Henry Baxter, has been the home of the Rutland Jewish Center since 1927.